Digital Employees

Changing the workplace to empower your digital workforce

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Contents

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Introduction

For organizations, the key to success in the digital age is not just about technology. It's also about developing a clear digital strategy based on an understanding of how the workplace is changing and becoming increasingly mobile.

Organizations need to embrace a new way of working that gets the best out of the 21st century workforce. In the right hands, digital technologies can help employees work more efficiently and effectively.

Businesses need to be more agile and responsive to changes in their market and the emergence of disruptive competitors. A close understanding of the technology landscape is important, but a culture of entrepreneurship and an adaptable and motivated workforce are even more so.

Over the next 10 years, the interaction and dependency between employees and digital will continue to accelerate:

▶ **Employee wellness** will grow in its significance, with employees comparing their health and well-being with other employees. Employers will start to take an active interest in the well-being of their employees.

▶ The interaction between **employees and automated systems** also will be commonplace as employees make subjective decisions around customers, and automation software completes the rest of the logic-based processes.

▶ Many businesses will move from **product-based** businesses to **service businesses**, resulting in frontline employees needing to interact with customers over a longer period of time.

▶ All this has profound implications for the role that **employees** play in an organization's success. It's imperative to re-imagine the workplace and empower your digital workforce.

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Based on our 2017 CGI Client Global Insights, cultural change is the top barrier to digital transformation success, and 50% of client executives are addressing culture, talent and digital employee challenges as part of their transformation initiatives.

Adapting to digital age employee expectations

People—whether customers or employees—expect a simple, fast and streamlined experience from the organizations with whom they interact.

People are increasingly looking for instant gratification, whether through instant service or an instant response. This trend is accelerating through technology adoption such as social media.

Both customers and employees are increasingly expecting to access services and information via digital channels **anytime and anywhere**. With the blurring of online and offline worlds, they're looking for a seamless experience that also is reliable and secure. And, they want to be seen as a person throughout the whole experience.

All of this has profound implications for the role **employees** play in an organization's success.

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Modern digital working

Creating a modern digital workforce requires an organization-wide integrated digital workplace. Key attributes of this type of workplace include:

▶ **Information sharing**

Digital transformation provides employees with better data to make better decisions and collaborate more effectively with both colleagues and customers. Improving **information sharing among organizations** also can help employees and customers, as well as improve efficiency.

▶ **Customer centricity**

Thanks to smart devices, tasks that touch the customer don't have to be performed in an anonymous back office—frontline employees can take care of them right in front of the customer.

▶ **Talent management**

Digital transformation can help make a company **more attractive to work** for and empower an effective workforce.

To attract the best talent and better serve customers, leading organizations are **better equipping their frontline employees**, providing more collaborative environments, tools and technology, and making sure they keep pace with evolving employee expectations.

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Tomorrow's winning organizations will invest in their frontline employees by providing them with tools to easily collaborate and quickly resolve operational problems and by empowering them to provide customers with the best possible service.

Who is the digital employee?

It's not just customers whose needs are evolving. Today's employees also have evolving needs:

▶ Employees increasingly want the **same digital experience** they're used to as consumers.

▶ They're impatient for progress, expecting all aspects of work and life to have the **quick speed** of the Internet.

▶ Increasingly, employees belong to the "Internet generation." They don't know a world without the web or indeed a mobile device—and they seamlessly integrate their offline and online lives.

▶ Employees often feel comfortable in pushing the boundaries of technology in their **personal lives**, experimenting with things such as wearables, health monitoring apps and smart TVs.

▶ Employees expect their experience to be **reliable and secure**, perhaps even more so than their customers.

Examples of digital employees

Nursing staff who are able to access patient records securely and quickly via multiple devices, allowing them to spend more time with patients, reducing their time spent searching for information, and improving patient outcomes and safety.

Customer-facing retail employees who respond to customer queries on social media, gaining better insight into what customers want and feeling a stronger sense of engagement and pride by linking each response to an individual.

Benefits of a digital workforce

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More organizations are realizing the wealth of business benefits to be gained once their workforce is enabled by digital technology.

▶ **Attract the best talent**

Today's workforce carefully evaluates the working environment of the companies they're considering joining.

▶ **Retain talent**

Employees will leave if they feel that companies aren't keeping up with them.

▶ **Get the most value out of employees**

Better use of digital technology will lead to improved efficiency and effectiveness.

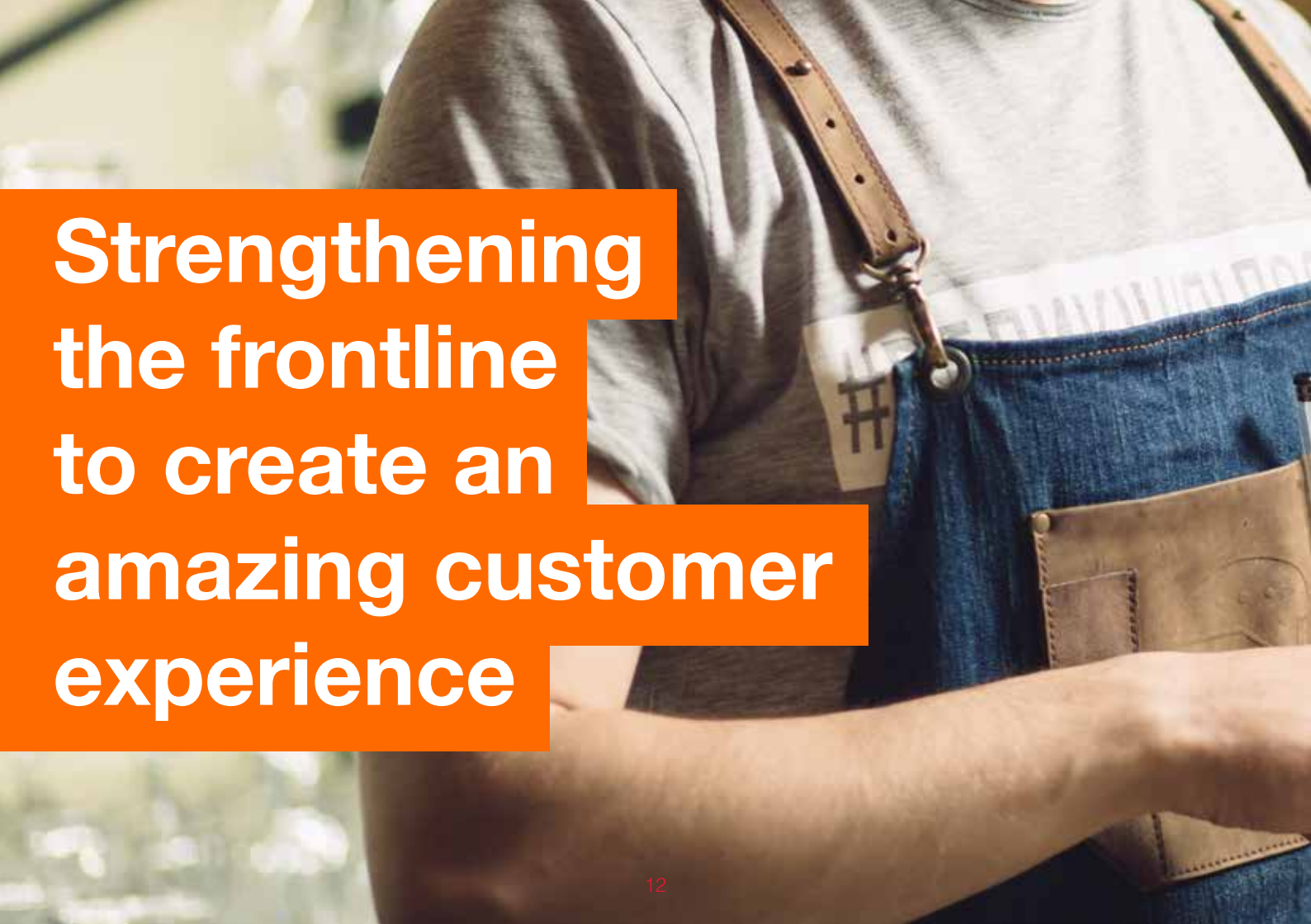▶ **Avoid missing opportunities**

Better knowledge management means more integrated collaboration.

What does this mean for you?

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▶ Leading organizations are focused on re-discovering the needs and expectations of their employees, just they do with their customers'. They're seeking to gain a better understanding of how employees work and what their needs are.

▶ How can your organization integrate these expectations into your overall organizational and digital strategy?

▶ Is your organization evolving with the changing expectations of the 21st century workforce while ensuring alignment with your business goals?

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Strengthening the frontline to create an amazing customer experience

The service a customer receives through an online portal or through speaking to someone on the phone or face-to-face shapes how they perceive an organization.

Organizations have long known that the best customers are loyal customers—people who trust their products and services enough to keep coming back for more, despite other choices available to them.

Growing and digitally enabling the frontline workforce sets it free to play a bigger part in the organization's success.

Connecting the frontline

Customer loyalty largely correlates with customer experience—in other words, how the customer experiences the brand at each point of interaction.

The challenge facing organizations today is making sure that this customer experience remains true to the organization's vision, no matter which channel the customer chooses to use.

What's important is that customers expect a **seamless experience** whether they're using an app or talking to an employee. Customers also expect to be able to easily switch between the physical and digital world to get a response to a query or complete a transaction. So, it's key that employees have **ready access** to all of the same channels as the customer and can provide added information and value.

However, many organizations today have large swathes of their workforce working without technology. This creates an "air gap," preventing customers from accessing everything that an organization has to offer. It often **hampers growth** and stops a great experience from being offered.

Digital plays a vital role in ensuring that the brand delivers a first-class experience by placing the **customer** at the heart of the business. It's causing entire industries and sectors to reshape their future and reconsider the role that frontline employees play.

Companies have always said that employees are their most important asset. The reality is that today, customers have a wide choice of digital channels available to them. This means that when they do interact with an employee, it's because they've chosen to do so or because they haven't found what they are looking for via other channels.

Increasingly, people expect better service from a person than they do online. Whereas online customers are happy to search and help themselves, they expect frontline employees to be more knowledgeable and offer a higher level of service.

What do customers want from frontline employees?

They expect the person who helps them to provide added information and value, compared to a website or app.

Employees need to have access to the same personalized information—and probably more.

Customers also expect the interaction to be reliable and secure.

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All this means that frontline employees have never been more important to an organization's success.

This is a particular challenge for companies with remote networks of sales staff—like retailers, banks and transport providers, for example.

Just as the Internet of Things is about doing more with your existing infrastructure, more organizations are realizing that to win, they need to **fully enable their people**. They recognize that those closest to customers often understand their needs the best.

Meanwhile, the costs of computing, connectivity and devices are falling all the time, creating opportunities to use technology in new ways.

Key drivers

Several factors have combined to elevate the potential of a connected frontline workforce.

Lower device costs

Organizations today can enable the majority of their workforce through low-cost smart devices.

Automation

Back-office roles can be automated, freeing up more resources to populate frontline roles. Automation of the back office is key to bolstering the frontline with digitally enabled employees.

Increasing customer service expectations

Online retailers have created a customer service culture that has spread across and beyond the retail and service sectors. It means that organizations can no longer ignore the demand for knowledgeable, empowered employees.

Zero moment of truth

For many successful companies, customer retention is a key focus. The cost of keeping a customer tends to be far lower than acquiring new ones.

Interactions between customers and frontline employees are a key way to **earn trust and loyalty**. Seemingly ordinary interactions—a broken shoe, a missing order, the wrong product bought by mistake—often mean a great deal to customers, and they invest a lot of emotional energy in the outcome. Handling these "moments of truth" well is critical for keeping a customer over the long term; it can transform wary or skeptical customers into strong and committed customers.

Innovating at the edge

What does strengthening the frontline mean for your organization's culture? Frontline employees need to be trusted to act in the moment, and they need the authority to make decisions without approval.

This doesn't mean that frontline staff have a free rein. Instead, management must set clear boundaries within which frontline employees can innovate. However, doing this raises a number of key questions:

▶ How will your organization have to change **culturally** to support digital working?

▶ What responsibilities does HR have in communicating the changes needed to ensure a **smooth journey**?

▶ What are the **security risks** of the digital workplace, and how can they be mitigated?

Knowledge capture

Frontline employees are the eyes and the ears of the organization. They are ideally placed to learn about, contribute to, and improve the customer experience. Problems that are within the frontline team's control can be actioned by the team. Those beyond the team's control can be actioned by the manager via another part of the service delivery chain.

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Delighting by default

Customer service tasks that were once handled in the back office can now be performed in real time in front of the customer. This helps to create a seamless, personalized and immediate experience for today's customers.

For exceptional customer service, businesses need to **pre-empt customer complaints**. By monitoring a customer's level of service or delivery, action often can be taken by frontline employees to address the issue before the customer even notices.

However, to do this, frontline employees need the **right information in real time**. For example, several airlines now equip onboard customer service managers with tablets, which hold valuable customer data and insights—helping to improve the customer experience.

The tablets give customer service managers real-time information about customers during the flight. They can congratulate customers who have just achieved the airline's top tier loyalty program, for example, or proactively make amends when customers have suffered a delay or encountered a problem.

Tablets also streamline the collection of feedback and help the airline act quickly to address problems that arise.

Ultimately, it's about giving people **good data** to make **better decisions**.

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What does this mean for you?

Leading organizations are **reimagining the role** of frontline employees. They're identifying which customer service processes currently performed centrally could be moved to the frontline and performed in front of the customer.

How will your **culture change** when employees are asked to make decisions themselves based on customer insight, rather than relying on rules and procedures?
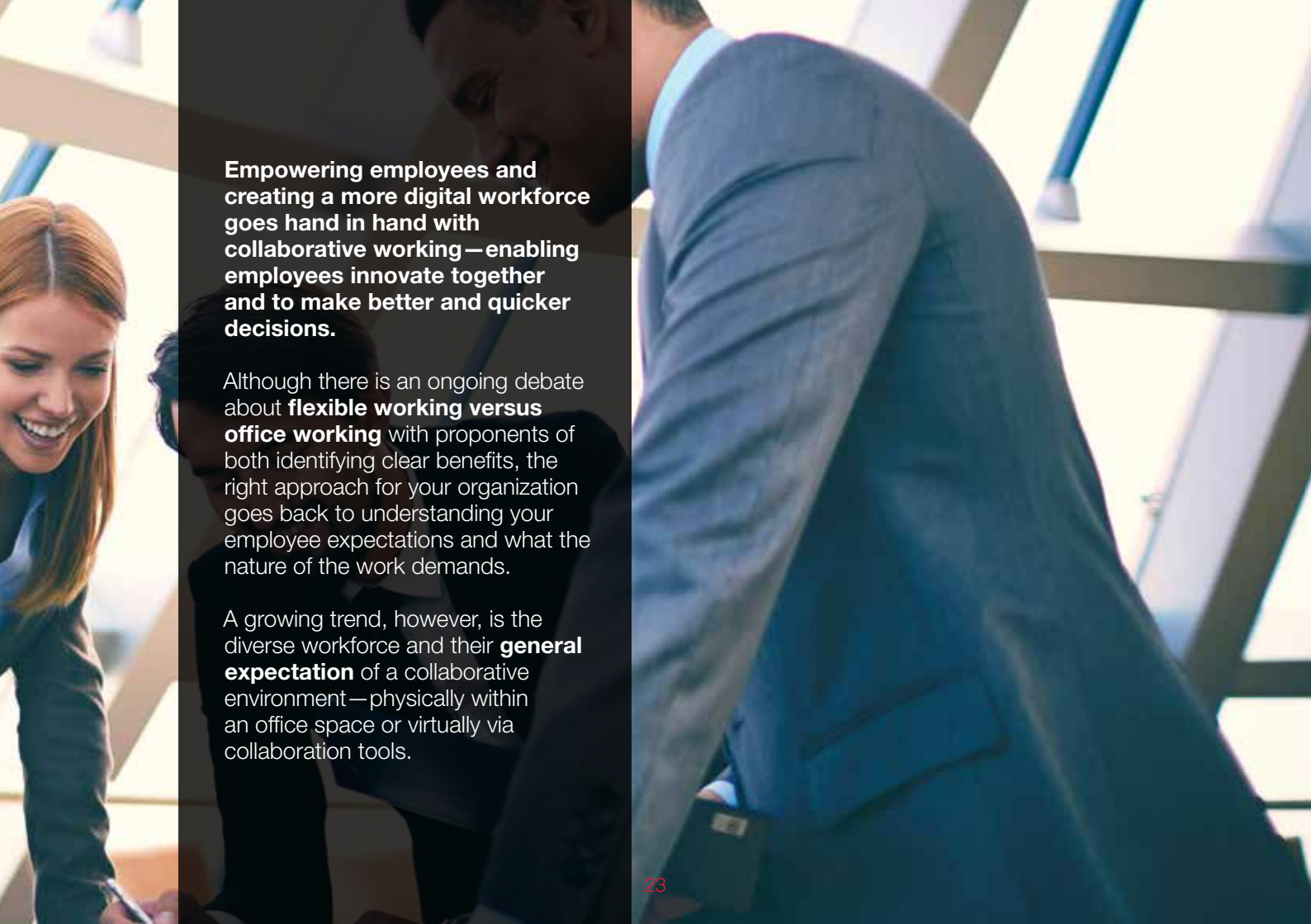
How can technology help your employees **better serve customers?** Technology enables employees to access the right information when it's needed, enabling them to treat customers as they want to be treated and transform the customer's transaction into a value-added experience.

How can your organization manage the **threat** that employees may perceive from new technology? Fear of the consequences of new technology can often get in the way of innovation if employees worry that they might be made redundant by it. As a result, **re-training and alternative career paths** need to be explored to encourage participation in innovation programs.

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Creating a collaborative work environment

Empowering employees and creating a more digital workforce goes hand in hand with collaborative working—enabling employees innovate together and to make better and quicker decisions.

Although there is an ongoing debate about **flexible working versus office working** with proponents of both identifying clear benefits, the right approach for your organization goes back to understanding your employee expectations and what the nature of the work demands.

A growing trend, however, is the diverse workforce and their **general expectation** of a collaborative environment—physically within an office space or virtually via collaboration tools.

The diverse organization

To get the best out of this multi-dimensional workforce, leading organizations are designing and embracing a new way of working.

Most businesses now draw their **talent from a range of different sources**—not just permanent employees.

Organizations are becoming more virtual and less vertically integrated than before. They enjoy greater efficiency and flexibility through the use of outsourced services, partners and freelancers. While partnering is not new, there are some new business combinations (e.g., crowd innovation, serendipity working locations, open source and crowd source development communities) that provide **innovation opportunities**.

As a result, the workforce is becoming multi-dimensional. Some of these professionals also will be working for multiple organizations at the same time, just as any supplier would. If business leaders are to get the best out of this **multi-dimensional workforce**, they need to design and embrace a new way of working.

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Rethinking ways of working

While new technologies have been well adopted and embraced in our personal lives, the workplace has not kept up. Technology provides the opportunity to rethink how we work and do business— and it's essential to enable collaborative and smarter working.

So far, organizations have focused on **productivity** and have standardized and automated their processes accordingly. The problem with this is the fixation on the process rather than the outcome, meaning that innovation and creativity are stifled—a serious problem in markets that are changing.

Although there is a **host of tools** available today—email, instant messenger, intranets and social collaboration tools—these are not yet being used to their full potential.

Most corporate users still default to email as their primary communication tool. According to the 2017 Adobe Consumer Email Survey Report, 79% of white collar workers interviewed in the EMEA[1] and 80% in the U.S. use email for communicating with colleagues regularly[2]. Just 16% in the EMEA and 18% in the U.S. use video conferencing or video chat for the same purpose. On average, EMEA workers spend 2.6 hours per weekday checking work emails and U.S. workers spend 3.3 hours per weekday doing the same.

This shows that email is an extremely useful and powerful tool. However, it's limited when it comes to sharing ideas and content across communities. It also can promote superfluous communication that is time-consuming to deal with and undermines efficiency.

(1) https://blogs.adobe.com/digitaleurope/files/2017/08/20170815_Email2017_EMEA_Report.pdf
(2) https://www.slideshare.net/adobe/adobe-consumer-email-survey-report-2017

Changing the way colleagues interact—for example, by using more social collaboration tools instead of email—could make us significantly more productive. The problem is that people still tend to communicate one-to-one or within closed groups. This means that other groups miss out on the information they need and knowledge becomes embedded in silos, **limiting discovery** by others who need it.

One solution may be to make communications open and public by default (whereas email is private by default) and to use more **collaborative forms of information** like notes, wikis or digital conversations, rather than standalone Word, PowerPoint and Excel documents that can exist in multiple versions.

Artificial intelligence can play a part in helping users to collaborate more effectively. Delve, Microsoft's machine learning application, learns how users work with Office 365 and with whom they collaborate. Based on this, Delve will then proactively offer and display more prominently the employees, documents, files, emails, notes and other elements of Office 365 it considers most relevant and important for each user at any given time

Reimagining the workspace

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New digital age employees and changing workforce dynamics require a workspace that is conducive to collaboration and innovation—be it an office space or home space.

There are several research reports that show a **positive correlation between workspace design and employee productivity** and well-being. Physical office spaces have shifted from personal cubicles to collaborative spaces that enable interaction, openness and sharing, while also offering quiet spaces for private work. Prime examples are leading innovators and profitable companies like Apple and Facebook that spend a lot of money in creating modern office spaces.

For a remote or flexible worker, this could be their home office, a café, a hotel room or an airport lounge.

The workspace design, as much as the place of work, must be conducive to the work to be done.

According to research published in the Journal of Experimental Psychology, an empowered office environment can increase worker productivity on cognitive tasks by 25%, and possibly more.

Innovative and collaborative culture

Of course, new technology alone will not result in the successful transformation of working practices.

Organizational structure and culture play key roles. As organizations today strive to be customer centric, moving to flatter and network organizations and pushing decision-making closer to the customer, they increasingly focus on business outcomes and harness the **diversity and creativity** of a global team.

Corporate culture also needs to be adapted to encourage an **experimental mind-set**, which embraces a spirit of inclusion and collaboration across the whole workforce, whether employees are permanent, freelance or from business partners. Senior executives need to lead by example, acting as ambassadors for the change program and quickly addressing any obstacles that arise.

At the same time, organizations need to change their employee management systems. Eighty-five percent of the respondents involved in our study agreed that systems for setting performance goals, monitoring performance and giving rewards have to be realigned or replaced to drive a change in culture.*

Finding talent with the right mind-set and digital skills, freeing them up for strategic work, and rewarding their contributions also is critical. Digital leaders are re-evaluating their recruiting and retention programs. They're also moving away from measuring individual performance to measuring business unit or team performance. The idea is to create a culture where teams are **empowered and motivated** to work together to achieve the organization's goals.

Securing the business
Arguably one of the greatest challenges for organizations globally is security. Cyber crime already is a major issue and can cause financial loss, reputational damage, theft of business-critical information or regulatory fines. Successfully introducing collaborative working often relies on ensuring that robust security processes and procedures are in place.

*Source: CGI Proprietary Study in Research Partnership with IDC (2017)

What does this mean for you?

▶ Is your organization ready to respond to **increased transparency**? Online forums and websites like Glassdoor.com, which let employees anonymously rate their companies, are driving growing demand for transparency.

▶ How will your **tools and working practices** need to change to enable collaborative working?

▶ How will your organization tackle the **cultural and structural challenges** that can stymie effective collaborative working?

▶ Is a **poor employee management system** the elephant in the room that's obstructing the new way of working?

Conclusion

The future is here today for many organizations. Leading digital organizations understand that digital transformation also is about engaging employees, especially those who engage with customers on a daily basis. Employees are equally important to an organization's long-term success as the customers whom they serve. Happy employees create happy customers

Besides digital technology, a digital workplace requires a culture of information-sharing, customer centricity and empowerment. According to the 2017 CGI Client Global Insights, 50% executives are addressing culture, digital employees and talent challenges.

Leading organizations are working now on their digital employee strategies to stay competitive and attract the best talent for best serving their customers.

If you're interested in doing the same and would like our help, please feel free to, contact us at info@cgi.com or visit cgi.com/digital-transformation.

About **CGI**

Founded in 1976, CGI is one of the largest IT and business consulting services firms in the world. Operating in hundreds of locations across the globe, CGI professionals help clients to achieve their goals, including becoming customer-centric digital organizations. We deliver an end-to-end portfolio of capabilities, from high-end IT and business consulting to systems integration, outsourcing services and intellectual property solutions that help accelerate clients' results. CGI works with clients around the world through a unique client proximity model complemented by a global delivery center of excellence network to help clients accelerate results, transform their organizations and drive competitive advantage.

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